

HISTORY OF THE ABIPONES.

19

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE ANCIENT AND UNIVERSAL METHODS OF DIS-
FIGURING THE PERSON.

MANY Europeans spoil their beauty by eagerly 304●
 imitating foreign customs, and always seeking new methods of adorning their persons. The Abipones disfigure and render themselves terrible to the sight from a too great attachment to the old customs of their ancestors; by whose example they mark their faces in various ways, some of which are common to both sexes, others peculiar to the women. They prick their skin with a sharp thorn, and scatter fresh ashes on the wound, which infuse an ineffaceable black dye. They all wear the form of a cross im- [53]
 pressed on their foreheads, and two small lines at the corner of each eye extending towards the ears, besides four transverse lines at the root of the nose between the eye-brows, as national marks. These figures the old women prick with thorns, not only in the skin, but in the live flesh, and ashes sprinkled on them whilst streaming with blood render them of an indelible black. What these figures signify, and what they portend I cannot tell, and the Abipones themselves

●304 are no better informed on the subject. They only know that this custom was handed down to them from their ancestors, and that is sufficient.

[531] I saw not only a cross marked on the foreheads of all the Abipones, but likewise black crosses woven in the red woollen garments of many. It is a very surprizing circumstance that they did this before they were acquainted with the religion of Christ, when the signification and morits of the cross were unknown to them. Perhaps they learnt some veneration for the cross, or gained an idea of its possessing great virtues from their Spanish captives, or from those Abipones who had lived in captivity amongst the Spaniards.

[554] The Abiponian women, not content with the marks common to both sexes, have their face, breast, and arms covered with black figures of various shapes, so that they present the appearance of a Turkish carpet. The higher their rank, and the greater their beauty, the more figures they have; but this savage ornament is purchased with much blood and many groans. As soon as a young woman is of age to be married she is ordered to be marked according to custom. She reclines her head upon the lap of an old woman, and is pricked in order to be beautified. Thorns are used for a pencil, and

304
881

HISTORY OF THE ABIPONES.

21

ashes mixed with blood for paint. The ingenious, but cruel old woman, sticking the points of the thorns deep into the flesh, describes various figures till the whole face streams with blood. If the wretched girl does but groan, or draw her face away, she is loaded with reproaches, taunts and abuse. "No more of such cowardice," exclaims the old woman in a rage, "you are a disgrace to our nation, since a little tickling with thorns is so intolerable to you! Do you not know that you are descended from those who glory and delight in wounds? For shame of yourself, you faint-hearted creature! You seem to be softer than cotton. You will die single, be assured. Which of our heroes would think so cowardly a girl worthy to be his wife? But if you will only be quiet and tractable, I'll make you more beautiful than beauty itself." Terrified by these vociferations, and fearful of becoming the jest and derision of her companions, the girl does not utter a word, but conceals the sense of pain in silence, and with a cheerful countenance, and lips unclosed through dread of reproach, endures the torture of the thorns, which is not finished in one day. The first day she is sent home with her face half pricked with the thorns, and is recalled the next, the next after that, and perhaps oftener, to have the rest of her face, her breast and arms

304 pricked in like manner. Meantime she is shut
 881 up for several days in her father's tent, and
 wrapped in a hide that she may receive no injury
 [278 4] from the cold air. Carefully abstaining from
 [262] meat, fishes, and some other sorts of food, she
 feeds upon nothing but a little fruit which grows
 upon brambles, and, though frequently known to
 produce ague, conduces much towards cooling
 the blood.

The long fast, together with the daily effusion
 of blood, renders the young girls extremely pale.
 The chin is not dotted like the other parts, but
 pierced with one stroke of the thorn in straight
 lines, upon which musical characters might be
 written. All thorns seem to have a poisonous
 quality, and consequently, from being scratched
 with them, the eyes, cheeks, and lips are horrid-
 ly swelled, and imbibe a deep black from the
 ashes placed on the wounded skin; so that a
 girl, upon leaving the house of that barbarous
 old woman, looks like a Stygian fury, and forces
 you involuntarily to exclaim, *Oh! quantum Niobe*
Niobe distabat ab illa! The savage parents
 [162] themselves are sometimes moved to pity at the
 [163] sight of her, but never dream of abolishing this
 cruel custom; for they think their daughters are
 ornamented by being thus mangled, and at the
 same time instructed and prepared to bear the
 304 pains of parturition in future. Though I de-

HISTORY OF THE ABIPONES.

23

tested the hard-heartedness of the old women in thus torturing the girls, yet the skill they display in the operation always excited my wonder. For on both cheeks they form all sorts of figures with wondrous proportion, variety, and equality of the lines, with the aid of no other instrument than thorns of various sizes. Every Abiponian woman you see has a different pattern on her face. Those that are most painted and pricked you may know to be of high rank and noble birth, and if you meet a woman with but three or four black lines on her face, you may be quite certain she is either a captive, or of low birth. When Christian discipline was firmly established in the Abiponian colonies, this vile custom was by our efforts abolished, and the women now retain their natural appearance.

[304]

[525]

[77]

CHAPTER V.

OF THE PERFORATION OF THE LIPS AND EARS OF THE SAVAGES.

A

- 301 THE Abipones, like all the other American
 • [304] savages, used formerly to pierce their lower lip
 with a hot iron, or a sharp reed. Into the hole
 some insert a reed and others a small tube of
 bone, glass, gum, or yellow brass; an ornament
 allowed only to the men when they are seven
 years old, never to the women. This custom
 M has long since been abolished amongst the later
 G Abipones, but is still continued by the Gua-
 ranies who inhabit the woods, by the Mbayas,
 Gu Guanas, and Payaguas. These people think
 p 301 themselves most elegantly adorned when they
 [304] have a brass pipe a span long, and about
 the thickness of a goose's quill, hanging from the
 lip to the breast. But this imaginary ornament
 renders them very formidable to European stran-
 gers; for they are of great height, their bodies
 are painted with juices of various colours, and
 their hair stained of a blood red; the wing of a
 vulture is stuck in one of their ears, and strings
 of glass beads hung round their neck, arms,
 knees and legs; thus accoutred they walk the

HISTORY OF THE ABIPONES.

27

hungry victors. An Abiponian boy of twelve years old, who used to eat at our table, was killed at the same time by these savages, and added to the repast, being eaten with the rest; but an old Abiponian woman, who had been slain there with many wounds, they left on the field untouched, her flesh being too tough to be used. Now let me speak a little of the adorning, or, more properly, torturing of the ears.

The use of ear-rings, which is very ancient, and varies amongst various nations, is highly ridiculous amongst the Americans. The ears of very young children of both sexes are always perforated. Few of the men wear ear-rings, but some of the older ones insert a small piece of cow's horn, wood, or bone, a woollen thread of various colours, or a little knot of horn into their ears. Almost all the married women have ear-rings, made in the following manner. They twist a very long palm leaf two inches wide into a spire, like a bundle of silk thread, and wider in circumference than the larger wafer which we use in sacrifice. This roll is gradually pushed farther and farther into the hole of the ear; by which means in the course of years the skin of the ear is so much stretched, and the hole so much enlarged, that it folds very tightly round the whole of that palm leaf spire, and flows almost down to the shoulders. The palm leaf

D
A
206
727

A
301
304

HISTORY OF THE ABIPONES.

20

by a long band, and hung down to the breast. The Paraguayrians, who had at first imitated the Peruvians, in course of ages invented still more ridiculous ear-rings, none of which a European could behold without laughter.

P
171
177
301

As the Abipones deprive their eyes of brows and lashes, pierce their lips and ears, prick their faces with thorns and mark them with figures, pluck the down from their chins, and pull up a quantity of hair from the fore part of their heads, I always greatly wondered at their preserving the nose untouched and unharmed, the cartilage of which the Africans, Peruvians, and Mexicans formerly perforated, sometimes inserting a string of beads into the hole. According to Father Joseph Acosta, book VII. chap. 17, Tikork, king of the Mexicans, wore a fine emerald suspended from his nostrils. The Brazilians from their earliest age perforate not the lower lip alone but also other parts of the face, inserting very long pebbles into the fissures; a frightful spectacle, as the Jesuit Maffei affirms in the second book of his History of the Indies. You would call the faces of the Brazilians tessellated work or mosaic. But the Parthians delighted still more in deforming themselves; for, according to Tertullian, Lib. I., cap. 10. De Cultu Fæmin. they pierced almost every part of their bodies for the admission of pebbles or

A
302
304●

B
304

DOO

HISTORY OF THE ABIPOKEE.

35

They climb high trees, and sit quietly
 on their boughs, in order to plunder the hives 149
 concealed there, without any sense of danger 222
 or giddiness. After their removal to our colo- 48
 nies, being fatigued with handling the axe and 75
 the plough, instruments to which they were 3
 unaccustomed, and feeling their strength fail
 them, their bodies bathed in sweat, and burn-
 ing with heat, they exclaimed, *La yivichigui*
yaugirs, now my blood is angry. For this they 757
 have a ready remedy: they plunge a knife deep
 into their leg, watch the blood spouting from
 it for some time with pleased eyes, and at
 length stop it by applying a clod to the wound,
 saying with a cheerful voice that they are re-
 covered, and feel perfectly well. They are 147
 as lavish, and almost prodigal in shedding 304
 their blood, for the purpose of obtaining glory,
 as of procuring health; for in public drink-
 ing parties they cruelly prick their breast,
 arms and tongue with a bundle of thorns, or
 with the sharp bones of a crocodile's back, with
 much effusion of blood. They emulate one 703
 another in doing this, in order to obtain a re-
 putation for bravery, and that these sponta-
 neous wounds may render them less fearful of
 shedding their blood in engagements with the
 enemy, and may make their skin impenetrable
 by covering it with scars. Boys of seven years 866
 old pierce their little arms in imitation of their

147
● 304
866 parents, and display plenty of wounds; indications of courage superior to their years, and preludes of war, for which they are educated from earliest infancy:

758 Persons wasted to a skeleton, and with every symptom of fever and consumption, we have seen restored to health by daily eating and drinking the alfaroba. When seized with a violent disorder, or dangerously wounded, they recover by the use of this easily obtained remedy, or, like dogs, without any at all. I have often with horror beheld many of them wounded with various kinds of weapons, their side pierced, their bones and ribs broken, their breath drawn with difficulty, the blood streaming from their numerous wounds; themselves, in short, the breathing images of death. When I saw these very Abipones a few weeks afterwards, riding or drinking, in full health, I could attribute it to nothing but the strength of their constitutions; for it certainly could not be owing to their unskilful physicians and inefficacious medicines. Every one knows that small-pox and measles are almost the only, and by far the most calamitous pest by which America is exhausted. The Abipones take the infection like the other Indians, but seldom fall victims to the disease, though, whilst under its influence, they are less careful of themselves than the

574 chief season for drinking. During these months
273 they drink without pause or intermission.

[221] They join the night to the day, with scarce
any interval for brief meals, or sleep: before
they have slept themselves sober they stag-
ger back to the party of drinkers. During
all that time you scarce ever find them in pos-
session of their senses; to live, with them,
is to drink, and you would say that the more
they drank the more thirsty they grew. To

show that they do not tremble at the sight
of blood, and that they take pleasure in
wounds, they emulously prick their breast
and arms, and not unfrequently their tongue,
with crocodiles' bones, and the sharpest thorns.

Disputes too are frequent among them concern-
ing pre-eminence in valour, which produce con-
fused clamours, fighting, wounds, and slaughter.

578
273
574 "In that skirmish you basely turned your back
on the enemy," one perhaps will say to the other;
who, not choosing to endure the reproach, replies
"What? What do you say?" till from words
they proceed to blows, to arrows, and to spears,
unless other persons interfere. It often happens
that a contention between two implicates and
incites them all, so that snatching up arms, and
taking the part, some of one, some of the other,
they furiously rush to attack and slay one ano-
ther. This is no uncommon occurrence in drink-